

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE - LANGUAGE TIPS

The following are some guidelines that should be used when speaking with or making reference to a person with a disability.

- Put the person first. Say "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person." For specific disabilities, say "person with Tourette Syndrome" or "person who has Cerebral Palsy" is usually a safe bet. Still, individuals do have their own preferences. If you are not sure what words to use, ask.
- Avoid outdated terms like "handicapped" or "crippled". Be aware that many people with disabilities dislike jargony, euphemistic terms like "physically challenged" and "differently abled".
- Say "wheelchair user" rather than "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair bound." The wheelchair is what enables the person to get around and participate in society; it's liberating, not confining.
- It's okay to use idiomatic expressions when talking to people with disabilities. For example, saying, "It was good to see you," and "See you later," to a person who is blind is completely acceptable; they use these expressions themselves all the time.
- Many people who are Deaf communicate with sign language and consider themselves to be members of a cultural and linguistic minority. They prefer to call themselves Deaf with a capital "D" and may be offended by the term "hearing impaired". Use the term "hard of hearing" to refer to people who have hearing loss but communicate in spoken language.

With any disability, avoid negative, disempowering words like "victim" or "sufferer." Say "person with AIDS," instead of "AIDS victim" or "one who suffers from AIDS."

If you are interested in more about this please contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Office, (301) 342-6671 or (301)342-6674.